

Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Cotabato City

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Abstract: In Region XII and ARMM, the most marginalized groups are often invisible in society: disabled children, girls, children in remote villages, and the very poor. Children with special needs in the community require a deep attention and proper care as well as understanding for appropriate educational curriculum. The study aimed to determine the current situations and educational needs of children with special needs in Cotabato City during the school year 2014 – 2015. The study had utilized the qualitative research method using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Interview method. The respondents of this study were the school administrators, teachers, parents and pupils with special needs in the three public elementary schools in Cotabato City division. As a result, the inclusive education, administrative support, teachers' factor, pupils Interest and Parents Involvement have great impact on the development of inclusive education in Cotabato City Division. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that inclusive education be continued and mainstreamed, the funding will be added and resource rooms be expanded, financial support for handicapped pupils be imposed and additional teachers will be recruited and trained for inclusive education curriculum.

Keywords: Handicapped Children, Gifted Children, Special Child, Mainstreamed, Marginalized & Health.

INTRODUCTION

The education for All Handicapped Children Act was reauthorized; and the name was changed to The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). There has been a thrust on the part of many special educators for total inclusion of all students with special needs into the general education.

In Region XII and ARMM, the most marginalized groups are often invisible in society: disabled children, girls, children in remote villages, and the very poor. These invisible groups are often excluded from the educational programs and access to education. Schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children from marginalized areas or groups.

Inclusive education should be viewed in terms of including traditionally excluded or marginalized groups or making the invisible visible. It is an approach that looks into how to transform education systems in order to remove the barriers that prevent pupils from participating fully in education; and this study is aiming to attain and sustain it rather than being a marginal

theme on how other children can be integrated in general education.

Education today aims for a successful inclusive education program and this has brought to the fore the issue of the effectiveness of teachers in an inclusive setting. This is especially aimed for those who are much accustomed to teaching in the mainstreamed or regular classroom. Teaching pupils with disability or special educational needs in the mainstreamed classroom sets a different atmosphere for the teachers. They get out of their comfort zone of teaching exclusively general early childhood education pupils. These teachers may be confronted with several questions on how to instruct these types of pupils or deal with them in the most effective way possible [1]. The transition from the traditional exclusive to an inclusive class is no easy task for these teachers are now faced with more intricate in teaching younger and heterogeneous pupils.

This study covered the situation of the teacher and the pupils in an inclusive classroom curriculum. The researcher believes that this study opened the field of inclusive education which DepEd is now implementing in Cotabato City division.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to determine the Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Cotabato. Furthermore, this study seeks to describe the administrative support, teachers' factor, pupils' interest and parents' support in the Inclusive schools in Cotabato City division.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study had utilized the qualitative research design using the focus group discussion (FGD), interview and observation method of research.

Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in the three popular and prominent public elementary schools in Cotabato City division; namely: Cotabato City Central Pilot School, Sero Elementary School and Tamontaka Central Elementary School.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were the school administrators, teachers, parents and pupils with special needs in the three public elementary schools in Cotabato City division.

Research Instrument

The researcher utilized the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interview guide, observation checklists and note taking.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher obtained permission from the Office of the Research Services to conduct the study. After which, a letter addressed to the Schools Division Superintendent, Department of Education (DepEd), Cotabato City was sought. After the approval of the letter by the Division Superintendent, the researcher presented it to the school principals of the research locale such as in Cotabato City Central Pilot School, Sero Central Elementary School and Tamontaka Central Pilot Elementary School.

Simultaneous schedules for an interview with the principal, teachers and coordinators, the pupil with special needs and the parents of the pupils were also done.

Data Analysis

The researcher utilized the content analysis in analyzing qualitative data through the process of triangulation. Different instruments like interview, classroom observation, self-rate checklist and the teacher's portfolio were used to gather the relevant information and to account the true picture of the situation. The responses and other information collected from interviews, classroom observation, and self-rate checklist were transcribed and sentences were divided

into categories or themes in a matrix coding analysis. As cited by Florian Kohlbacher, in her work entitled [6], "The Use of Qualitative Content Analysis in Case Study Research," she contends that "coding forces the researcher to make judgments about the meaning of contiguous blocks" and that coding is "the heart and soul" of text analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of the Philippine education is to help all citizens have access in education; regardless of religion, creed, status and belief to become self-sufficient, self-regulated and law abiding individuals who will take care of themselves and their families and to make contributions to the society and humanity [2]. In order to meet this objective, Department of Education (DepEd) had introduced inclusive education to address the educational needs of the children with special needs [5].

Inclusive education is implemented nowadays in the public schools including the elementary school where the study was conducted. Although, the one of the said school does not have a SPED Center for inclusive education, the program was still adopted by the school. Considering the limitation that only three big public elementary schools were chosen as the area to participate in the study. Difficulties were not met by the said schools, although challenges were encountered in the implementation of inclusive education for children with special needs in Cotabato City Division. Specifically, there were problems on the following; Pupils Interests, Teachers Factor, Administrative Support and Parents Involvement.

Teachers Factor

Teachers have their own methodologies and approaches in teaching to deliver the services needed by the children with special needs in education and in preparing their lessons as what the school administration and the parents expected. Although some are not really that effective in delivering their lessons, the vision and mission remain the same and that is to educate the learners and for the lessons to be understood by the learners.

The teacher respondents believed that having a preparatory grades for special children or inclusive education program greatly affects the development of learners. They adhered to the fact that it is the key to help children with special needs. They also admitted that the understanding of the special children on the subject-matter seems slower than the regular pupils. Moreover, they said that an inclusive classroom is a challenge. They have to consider the teaching strategies that would do both for the regular pupils and the children with special needs. When the teachers were asked of their understanding and acceptance of DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2009 influenced their teaching methods

and strategies, classroom management, assessment of the learners, they responded[5]:

Inclusive education is a program that helps children with special needs. These children with special educational needs are mainstreamed in a regular class. The idea is for these children to learn in a regular classroom. Thus, in essence, there are two types of children in the class. In this regard, teaching strategies really matter. We need to prepare two types of lesson plan, one for the regular class and another (maybe two or three, depending on the number of children mainstreamed in my class) for those children with special educational needs. Supposedly, a SPED teacher prepares the individual lesson plan for those who are mainstreamed in a regular classroom but in reality, it is the burden of the receiving teacher like me. However, the children are already in my classroom and it's not healthy for them to be forced to learn the way regular class do. For one thing, they need special educational attention. Thus, a different teaching strategy has to be utilized for them.

As per observation, most of the strategies employed by the teacher respondents in their inclusive classroom were experimental. They used different strategies to the children with special educational consideration. However, classroom observation shows that the instructional materials given to a child with special needs was not modified. This did not conform to DepEd Order No. 72 s. 2009 which explicitly states that instructional material for children with special needs should be modified according to their disability. This findings was clear in her reflective journal where they accepted that she really found difficulty in managing her learners most especially when the 15-year-old girl with special needs has a seizure.

The other teacher shared the same that the teachers in an inclusive classroom should use different strategies for the special children. They believed that the understanding and acceptance of a teacher handling inclusive classroom would influence or affect their methods and strategies, classroom management and even her assessment of the learners. This statement is in accordance with the study of Marland and Osborne [3], which states that the existence of disparity among teachers regarding how they see and understand the concept of things, which might be an order or system, will likely influence their performance in teaching.

Despite the teacher's difficulties in an inclusive education, their values and beliefs gave their motivation to contribute to the shaping of the teaching methods and strategies, classroom management and assessment of the learners. It was observed that the teacher used play as a strategy to develop relationship between and among learners.

In an inclusive education, the teachers who are tasked to handle such classroom are expected to have enough knowledge in dealing with special children. This knowledge could be sourced from the teacher's educational background and attitude (values and beliefs) towards children most especially those who have special needs.

Based on the statements of the teachers handling the inclusive classroom, it was believed that teachers should have proper educational background to effectively teach special children. They also stressed that in teaching an inclusive classroom; the teachers should have the patience, heart, energy and creativity to make learning meaningful and successful.”[4].

Administrative Support

The school administrators on the other hand, said that the teachers in inclusive classroom must have trainings seminars in inclusive education. A regular teacher cannot handle special children if she does not know anything about dealing with the special children. She further averred that it is very difficult to deal with these children because their ability is far different from that of regular children. The teachers should have ample background and should undergo trainings and workshops in dealing with these children. The administrator believed that teachers in his school are not effective with this program for now. He concluded that their trainings and educational background is not to become effective teachers in an inclusive education.

The teachers who have no trainings regarding handling special children would really have a hard time teaching children with special needs. Such fact really matters.

The department of Education made its move to ensure that education will be available to all without exemption, even for the children with special needs. They make the initiative to make the school accessible to everybody. It is a common knowledge that inclusion has its advantages, and therefore it is imperative for Administration and even SPED teaches to support regular teachers and equip them with the knowledge they need to be able to handle inclusive education.

Based on responses in the interview and self-rate checklist, it can be gleaned that the administrators have enough support coming from the department of education budgets. In fact, they could recruit other teachers on handling children with special needs since there is no SPED teacher in their school and within the district. The inclusive teachers said that they have enough support from the administration. Since this program is new to the school, they have been given enough attention by the administration. They also said that they have undertaken any trainings and seminars about special education.

The school administrators firmly believed that they have ample background in this kind of program. Thus, they believed that trainings and seminars are the best thing that the administration could have extended to the teachers so that they will become more efficient and effective in implementing and handling their classes. They also stressed that the schools have Maintaining and Other Operating Expenses (MOOE) in which one of the purposes is to improve the physical plant and facilities. They also added that they are adopting this mentoring system wherein teachers who are newly-hired and new in the service will be trained to handle inclusive classroom.

Pupils' Interest

As to the interest of the pupils, when asked by the researcher during the interviews, it was noted that they were very eager to attend the class. As per observation, they listens attentively in their sits, writes silently and actively participated in the class oral readings and oral recitations. It was supported by the responses of their teachers during the interviews which they said, our pupils both in the preparatory grades and mainstreamed grades that they are very interested with a rating of 95% to attend their classes.

Parents' Support

As to the support of parents, it can be gleaned from the interview that their parents strongly assisted and guided their children with special needs in education in their classes. It was rated 100% by the teachers' respondents that parents of the special children unanimously supported the education of their children. It was evidenced with the presence of the parents who guarded their children every day in their classes and during the school activities.

Conclusions

On the bases of the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs in Cotabato City is well managed with the strong support of the school heads, teachers' factor as well as the strong support or their parents.
2. Interest of Children with special needs is very evident and they can go hand and hand with the regular pupils.
3. Inclusive Education greatly help the special children, parents and the community in Cotabato City to cater the education of their children.

Recommendations

In the light of the conclusions of the study, the following are strongly recommended:

1. Government support to the implementation of Inclusive Education program shall be improved and sustained.

2. More trainings and seminars for teachers on the pedagogy of teaching shall be facilitated to the Inclusive education.
3. Inclusive Education curriculum shall be strengthen by the DepEd.
4. Further study is highly recommended.

Recommendation for Further Study

From the findings and results of the study, it is recommended to have further study on the following;

1. Evaluative Study on the Inclusive Education in Region 12.
2. The role of DepEd in Managing Children with Special Needs in ARMM.
3. Assessment on the Academic performance of Special Children in Cotabato City Division

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